

AVALON

Vol. III,
No. IV

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A supplement of The Chart
Missouri Southern State College
Joplin, Mo. 64801-1595

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AVALON

Missouri Southern's Monthly Art and Literary Magazine

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Avalon is published by Missouri Southern's communications department as a supplement of *The Chart*.

Persons wanting to submit material (artwork, photographs, short stories, and poetry) may do so by dropping it by *The Chart* office, Room 117, Hearnes Hall. Artwork and photographs submitted must be ready for publication. Size alterations may be made on such work if it is needed in order to make the material fit within *Avalon's* pages. Literary material submitted must be in a legible format (typewritten is preferred).

Avalon claims no publication rights to work appearing in its pages.

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EDITOR'S COLUMN

Too often in the past, members of *Avalon's* staff have worried extensively about getting enough submissions to put together an issue of this magazine.

Yes, it seems like we're constantly asking for people to submit material. Right? (Right.)

Throughout this time of our griping and begging for the attention of artists, writers, and photographers, we seemed to have forgotten about our readership. I don't know how many people browse through the magazine, and I don't know how many people even read the editor's column. But I do know, *Avalon* has a readership because of the compliments and complaints we receive.

The first issue of *Avalon* last fall (Oct. 22) contained a "Letter to the Editors." Since that issue, we haven't had any letters of any sort come in. I would like to encourage our readers to write "Letters to the Editors." Address letters to: *Avalon* care of *The Chart*, and mail or turn in letters at *The Chart* office. (No, I'm not begging for letters.)

I surely hope you enjoy *Avalon*, because it takes a lot of time and money to produce.

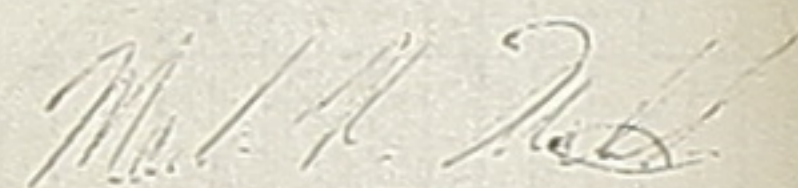
The staff spends hours upon hours compiling an issue. It seems unavoidable that Mike, Dharmendra, and I burn the midnight oil putting an issue together. Nancy and Chris put in their "two-bits worth," as well, doing miscellaneous stuff.

An issue costs \$200+ to print. Production costs include the cost of supplies, such as "border tapes," (We use border tape to make lines, boxes, and different shapes on the layout sheets.), "shading film," (It's the stuff that we put inside of boxes, shadow things with, and just try to make things look good with.) and film for the typesetter. That's not to mention the \$5 to \$10 in change we spend at the vending machines

to keep us going.

I especially hope you enjoy this issue of *Avalon*. When you browse through the pages, you'll probably notice that there is absolutely no artwork. Artwork submissions are getting hard to come by. This issue does, however, have a spread of photos—in *The Gallery*. Surprisingly, we have some short stories and an essay, as well as the thing on Page 3 that can't be classified as much of anything—you read it and then tell us what it is. And, of course, we have poetry. It seems we're destined to always have poetry. A couple issues back, we were drowning in the flood of poetry we had received. Poetry submissions are steady. As we were restricted to 12 pages (due to lack of funds), we didn't run as much poetry this time as in the past. It seems many people don't enjoy the poetry which appears in *Avalon*, and some even make derogatory comments about our running so much poetry. Yes, we hear the criticism, and we listen to it. This issue doesn't have all that much poetry in it—but it's still there. We have no intention of ceasing to run poetry. But this issue seems to show a better balance between poetry and other submissions.

I feel this issue is one of the best issues of *Avalon* ever. It's a 12-pager, and some might say it doesn't even approach the two 20-page issues of *Avalon* just because of its size. And though this issue contains no artwork, that doesn't discount the balance of the rest of the contents of this magazine. It would have been great to have a good balance between art, photos, poetry, short stories, and essays. (I'm just dreaming—that'll probably never happen.) I hope you feel this issue is a good issue, as well. You're as much a judge of this magazine as I am, though I put a good chunk of it together.



THE DEADLINE for
submissions to this semester's
last issue of *Avalon*
is Thursday, April 14.

COVER ART

This issue's cover was designed by
Mark R. Mulik of the *Avalon* staff.

Final Examination on the Foundations of Education

a presentation by Dr. Robert C. Wiley

Since this course is a culmination of your academic preparation for a teaching career you are expected to have mastered a broad range of subject matter. Just as teaching touches upon all areas of life, this examination includes items from a variety of academic areas.

Read each item carefully and respond fully to each and every question.

HISTORY: Describe the history of the papacy from its origins to the present day. Concentrate especially, but not exclusively, on its social, political, economic, religious, and philosophical impact on Europe, Asia, America, and Africa. Be brief, accurate, and specific.

BIOLOGY, HEALTH, HYGIENE: You will receive a kit containing a razor blade, a piece of gauze, and a bottle of Scotch. Remove your appendix. Do not suture until your work has been inspected.

SPEECH & COMMUNICATIONS: At the sound of the gong, 40 cannibalistic aborigines will rush into the room. Calm them and lead them in singing 'God Bless America.' You may use any ancient language except Latin or Greek.

BIOLOGY, CHEMISTRY, GENETICS: Create life. Estimate the differences in subsequent human culture if this form of life had developed 500 million years earlier. Give special attention to its probable effect on the English parliamentary system of government. Prove your thesis.

MUSIC: Write a piano concerto. Orchestrate and perform it with guitar and drum. Evaluate the contribution of this composition to future civilizations.

PSYCHOLOGY: Based upon your knowledge of their work and lives, evaluate the emotional stability, social adjustment, and repressed frustrations of each of the following: Queen Isabella, Alexander the Great, Ramses II, Hammurabi. Support your evaluations with quotations from each and prepare an annotated bibliography.

SOCIOLOGY: Estimate the sociological problems which might accompany the end of the world. Construct an experiment to test your theories and project statistical probabilities of accuracy.

ECONOMICS: Develop a realistic plan for refinancing the national debt. Criticize your plan from all possible points of view.

PHYSICS: Explain the nature of matter and outline the structure of the universe. Include in your answer an evaluation of the impact of mathematics on science.

PHILOSOPHY: Outline the development of human thought and estimate its significance. Compare and contrast human thought with any other kind of thought.

INDUSTRIAL ARTS: In the box beside your desk are the disassembled parts of a high-powered rifle, a flask of powder, a bar of lead, and an instruction manual printed in Swahili. Three minutes after you open the box a hungry tiger will be admitted to the room. Take any action you feel appropriate. Be prepared to justify your action.

Untitled

a flower

budding
and growing
without regard

unmindful
of earth, moisture, sun or bees

content and fulfilled
to be growing
and
to be
beautiful

Cheryl Jenkins

Untitled

Smooth gliding tension
purified thoughts
Absolute inner peace
raw endurance
Relentless physical struggle
intense serenity
Crystal, amorous depths
insatiable need
Fulfilling, relaxing beauty
primal drive
Undisturbed, rhythmic motion
merciful silence
Awkward, flailing conflict
familial acceptance
Contemplating another bout
ultimate release

R. Leigh Miller

Untitled

Loss—Emptiness
A tide that moves in and out.
Not being controlled by the moon,
But by those who only include me
when necessary
Or, when help is needed.
And never simply
Just Because.

Miriam Wier

Childhood Memories and Mosquito Bites

an essay by Darla Clark

Strolling down the rocky, dirt road shaded by large oak trees provides a perfect setting for reminiscing about childhood days and adventures long-since past. The wild grapevines entwined among the branches of the trees make a roof over the road. This roof makes it very cool and shadowy, just enough to give the mind space to roam.

As a child, I loved walking down the road, pretending that it was a hidden path to my "castle," a very secret place to me. In my castle, anything was possible. There could be golden apples, magic pathways, and even fire-breathing dragons.

My secret "castle" was a bridge over a small country stream. When I was at my castle I could fish, swim, be a queen, have a look-out tower, or whatever my imagination could possibly dream up. Sometimes I would go there just to think. The magic would somehow soothe my childhood cares.

The brisk, cold water, running over the rocks, creating a "waterfall" was my magic potion. Just sitting on the bridge watching it go by seemed to calm my spirit.

The area under the bridge was always my private lair. If I wanted to hide, I could crawl under it and catch crawdads or just sit there—whatever happened to strike in my mind.

I recall that the narrow, beaten path leading to my "lair" under the bridge always seemed a mile long. I would imagine that grasshoppers, dragonflies, and other insects on the weeds beside the path were armored warriors. I would tip-toe down the path quietly, so they wouldn't hear me and ambush me.

The rocks that made a stepping-stone path across the creek became my drawbridge. I had to sprinkle the "magic potion" on the bridge so it would let me cross, without devouring me. As I began my long journey across the drawbridge, I had to be very careful. If I took one wrong step, I could fall in the pit and be put into slavery by horrible green monsters with slime for hair.

The trees opposite the "drawbridge" were the sign of enemy territory. The poison ivy and brush pile represented danger. If I got too close, the enemies would capture me.

The mosquitos, which never seemed to fail being present, were vampires. If I got bit, I had to sprinkle the "magic potion" on the bite so I wouldn't turn into a bat.

As I sit on the bridge, my "castle," years later—the past, present, and future all seem to become one. I look on at the flowing stream, my "magic potion," and sadden a bit as I think of all the memorable days gone past. But my spirit lightens as I realize that I can still come here when I need time to think, or just to take in the beauty. While I am here, I can once again be anything I desire to be—at least for a while!

A Step Back

short fiction by Darcy Tucker

As we walk into the dimly-lit restaurant, I have to blink a few times before my eyes adjust to the darkness of the room. As I look around, I realize we are the only four in the restaurant. No one has come to greet us, and so we sit in the silence, waiting. After a few moments, an old lady comes limping out, takes our orders, and slowly makes her way back to the kitchen.

He is sitting across from me. I look up to find his brown eyes staring intensely. Although there is no one else around, he is talking softly, in a hushed tone. His sentences are fragments, as though he has so many thoughts and ideas he can't help but start one right after the other.

An ancient jukebox stands in a corner. It is dusty, long-forgotten. Across from it is a fully-stocked bar. Maria is opening drawers of cabinets to examine the contents. Shane is looking at her, amused. Curiosity gets the best of me. I walk over to the jukebox and drop in a few quarters. As I choose my selections, I feel him breathing over my shoulder. As Frank Sinatra's voice begins, I hear him start to sing along. The surprise must show on my face. A small, half-smile appears on his face, as if he is pleased he has surprised me. It disappears quickly like it has hurt him. I look at his eyes, but they hold no expression. He gives nothing away. He has mastered this. Suddenly a small flicker appears in them. He has an idea. I read

thoughts well.

"A dare," he says. "Do you have courage?"

I look at him and nod. Yes, I do.

He glances at the unattended bar. "Then drinks it shall be," he says. "Four please."

He has tested me. He knows this. He watches me closely as I silently make my way to the bar. I hear noises from the kitchen. I know she is busy. I pray she is the only one back there. I walk behind the bar and grab a full liquor bottle. Then I dash back to the table with it. He mixes the drinks with the touch of an expert, so precise it is almost frightening. We drink in complete silence. To talk now would shatter the total control we are all experiencing.

The liquor has affected us. We become bold. A camera is produced. *Pictures?* I take a red-checked tablecloth and place it on my head.

"How does it look?" I ask him.

"Foreign," he says. "Swedish, like Heidi—perhaps a very rebellious Heidi."

"But Heidi lived in the Swiss Alps, didn't she?" I question.

He sighs, "Yes, I suppose she did."

More pictures are taken.

"I love you," Maria says to no one in particular.

"And I love you, also," he replies.

Shane is criticizing the walls. The jukebox has stopped. It is too silent. I walk over to put more money in. I feel we are trapped forty

years back in time and will never get out. As I walk back to our table, I stop to look at an ancient clock. It does not tick. It must have stopped running a very long time ago. I hear a question being directed at me. My mind and memory are lost in a distant haze.

"Who do I love?" I say. *Anyone who dares to love me back, of course. "All of you."*

The food is being brought out, so I sit. We eat slowly. We have the rest of our lives to hurry. Much too soon the trays are removed, the bill paid.

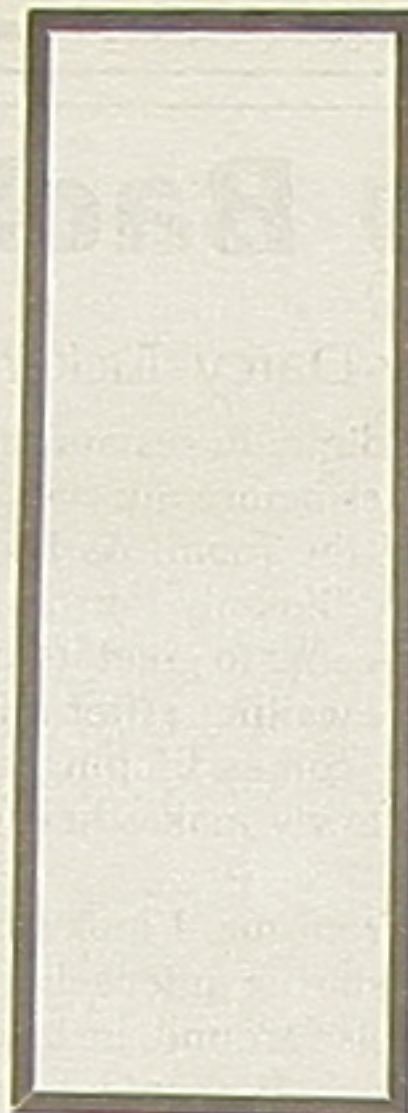
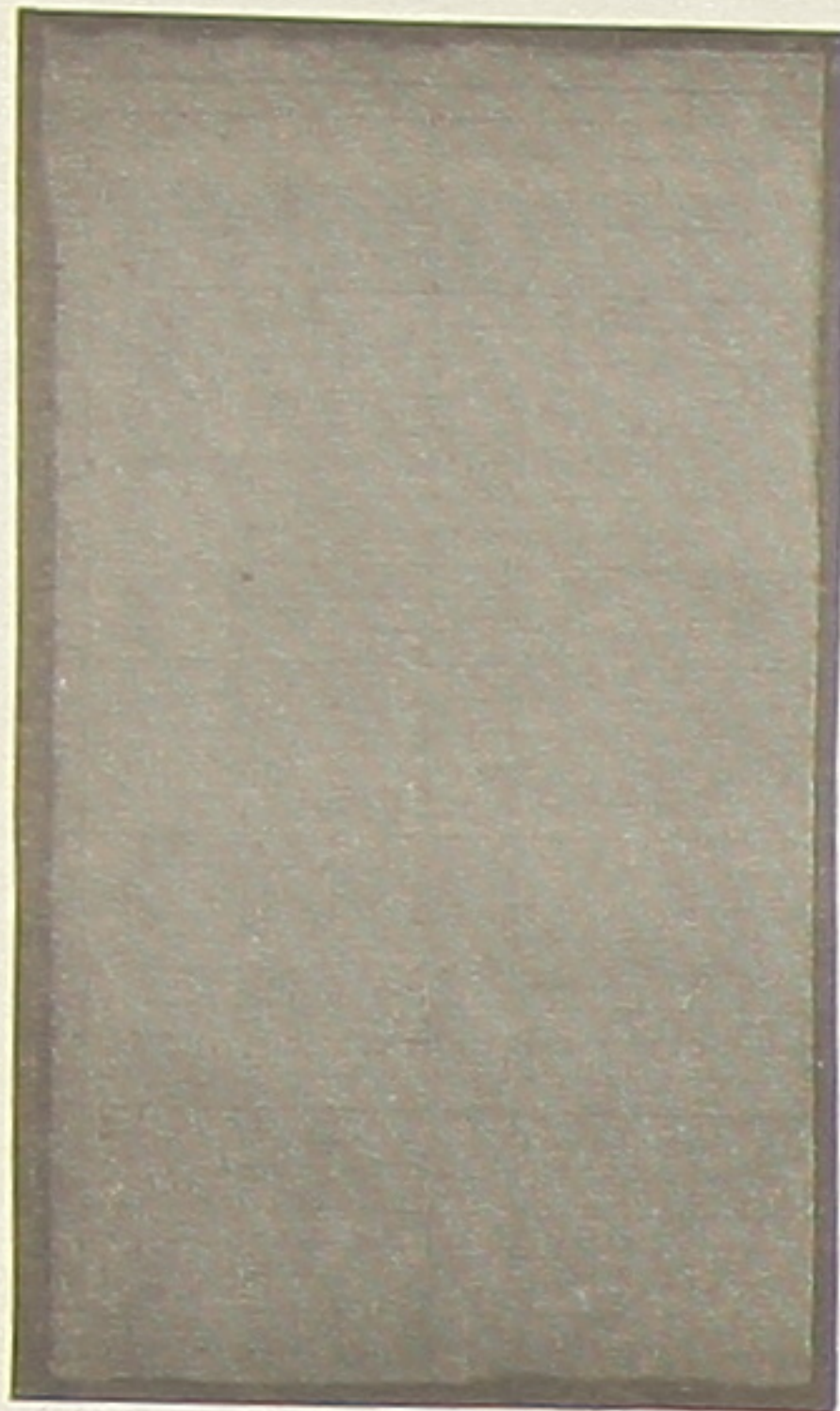
He is writing a poem on the wall. "For you," he says.

*You take away my air,
You make my lungs collapse,
I die tonight feeling devastated,
Tired and deflated,
That's what I call love.*

As we walk out, he is inches from me. He doesn't touch me. He doesn't need to. The way his eyes search me says it all. I know he loves me and perhaps this is why I love him.

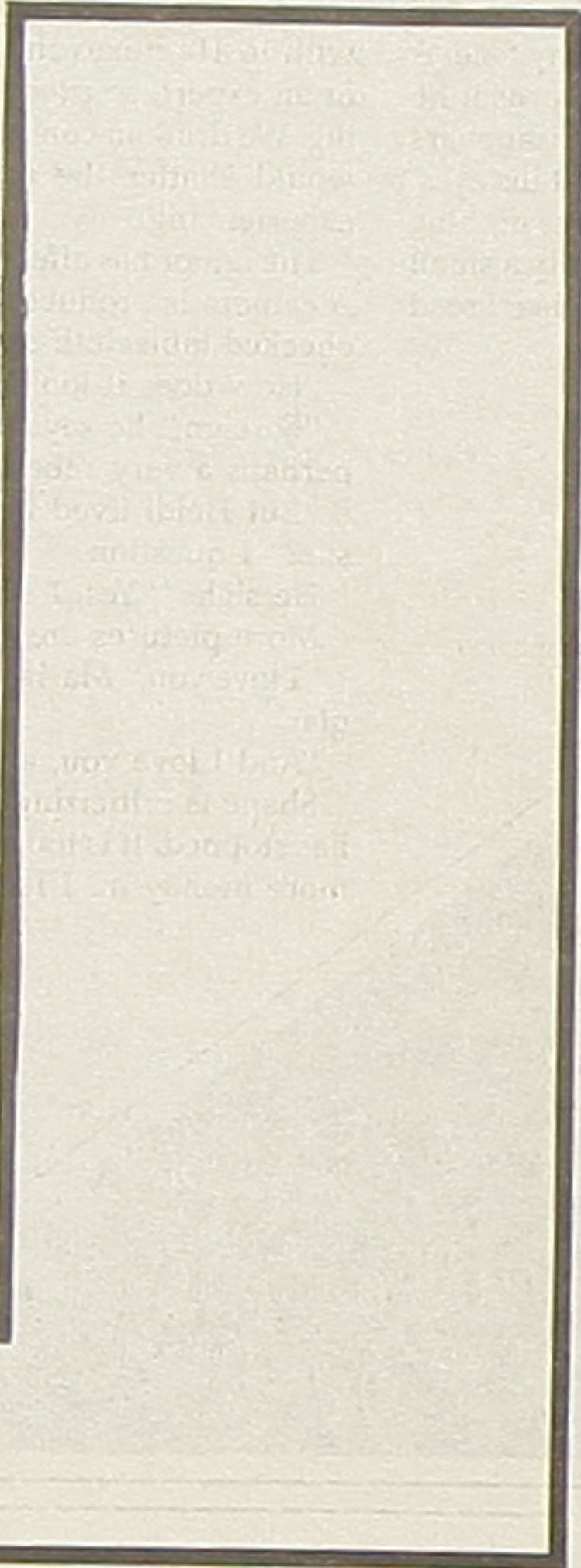
The old lady is watching us with suspicion in her eyes, while her mouth smiles endlessly. We have tested her. We have won. She has never figured us out. It shows too clearly.

I feel a universe away as we walk to the street. And I feel things will never be quite the same again for any of us. But this doesn't matter, because for now, we are together. ◀

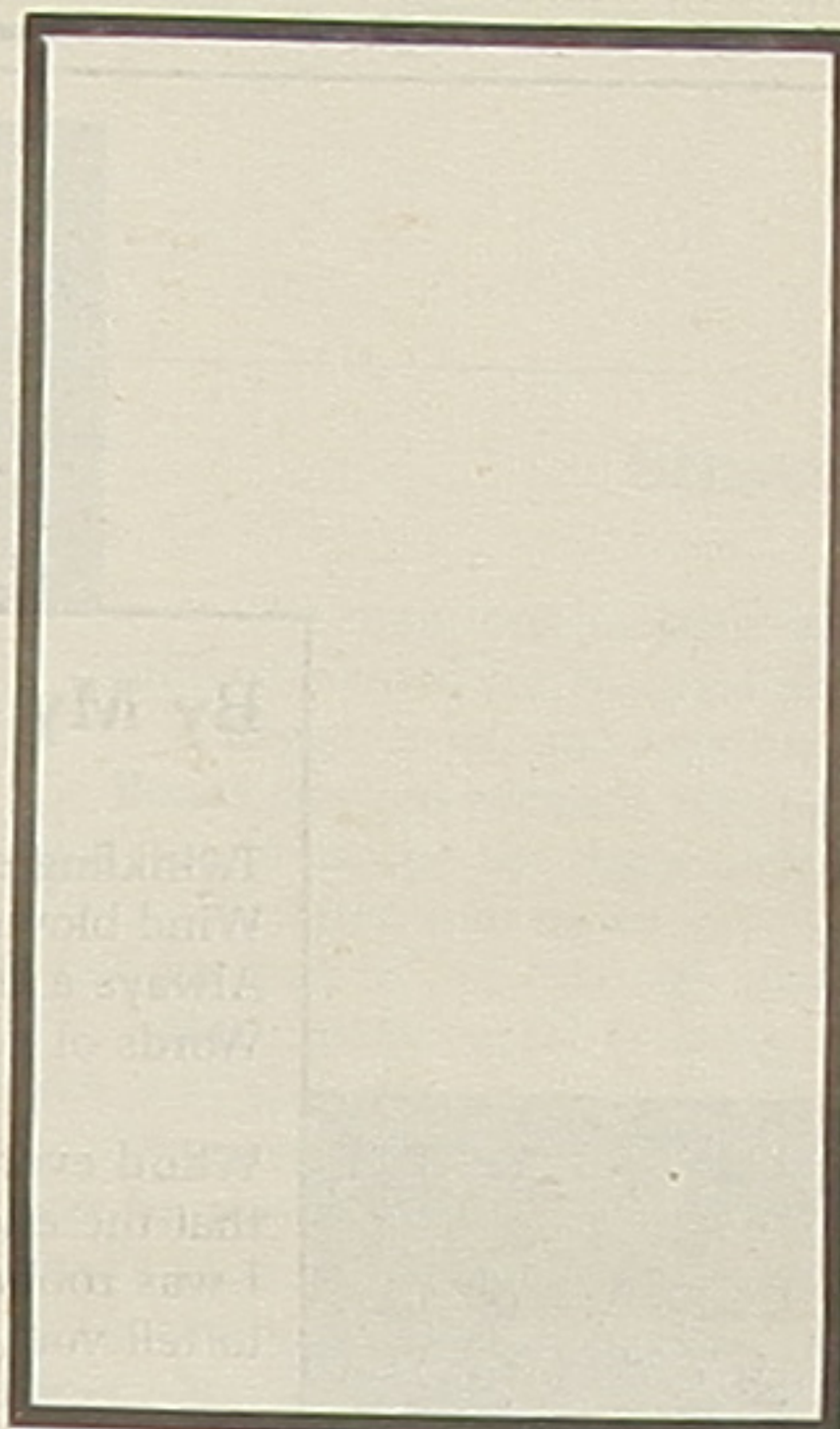
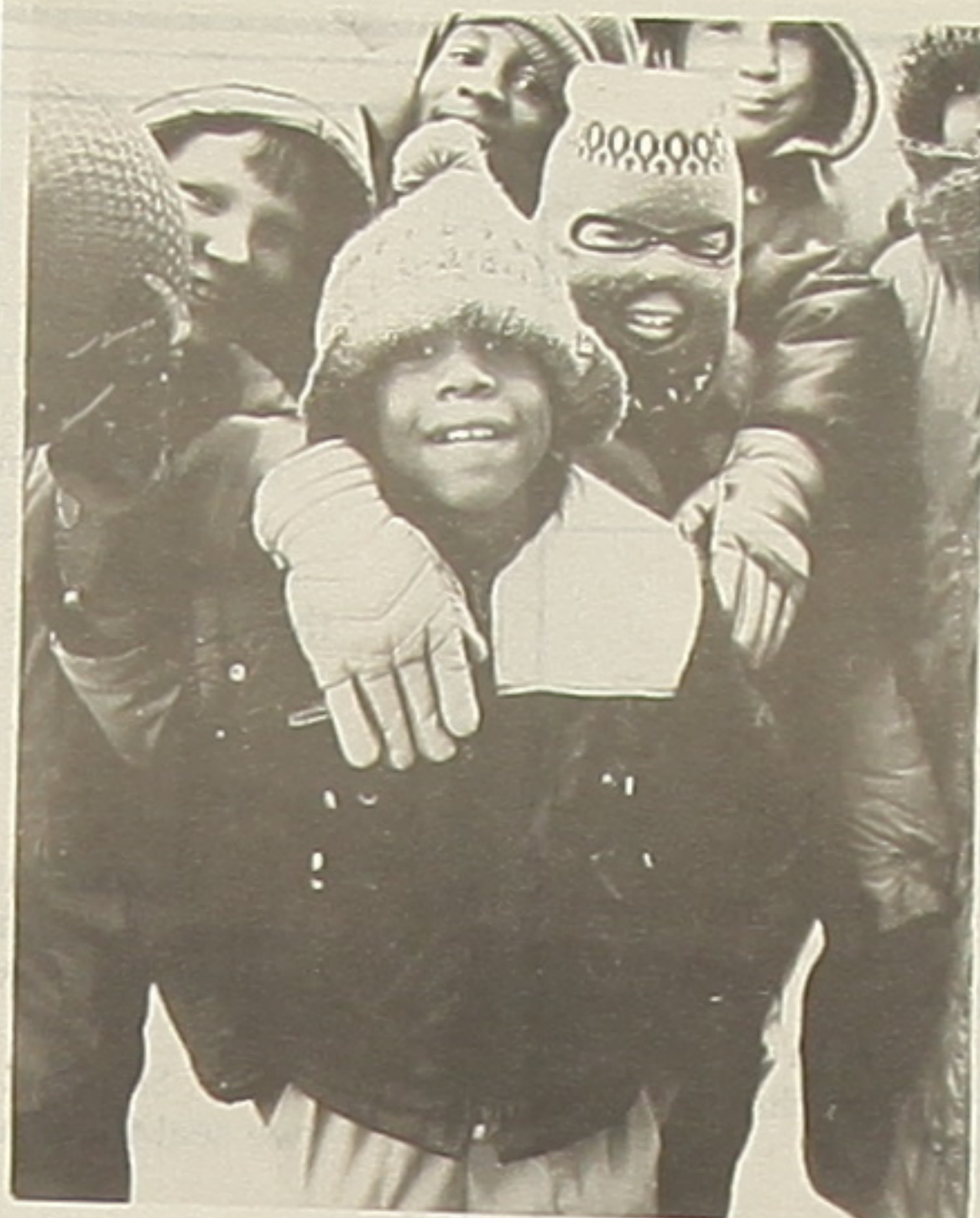
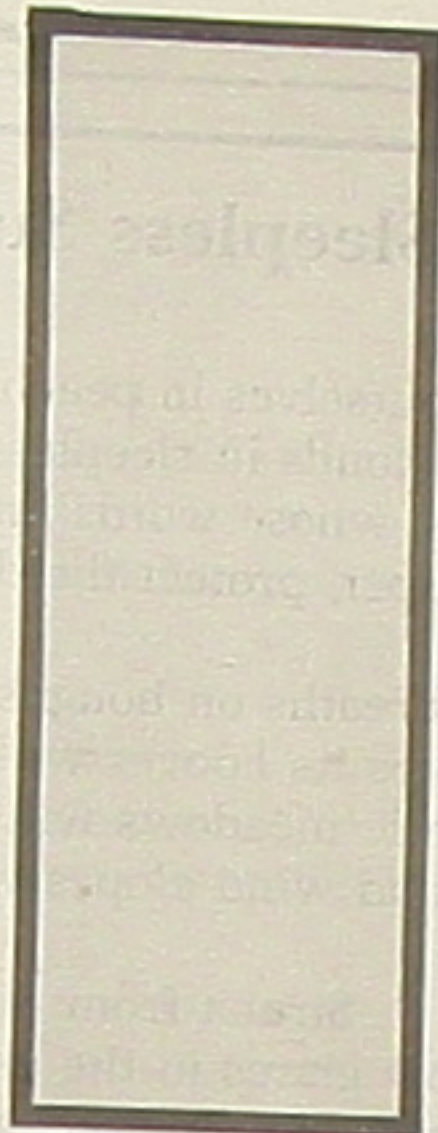


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Photos by Sean Vansl

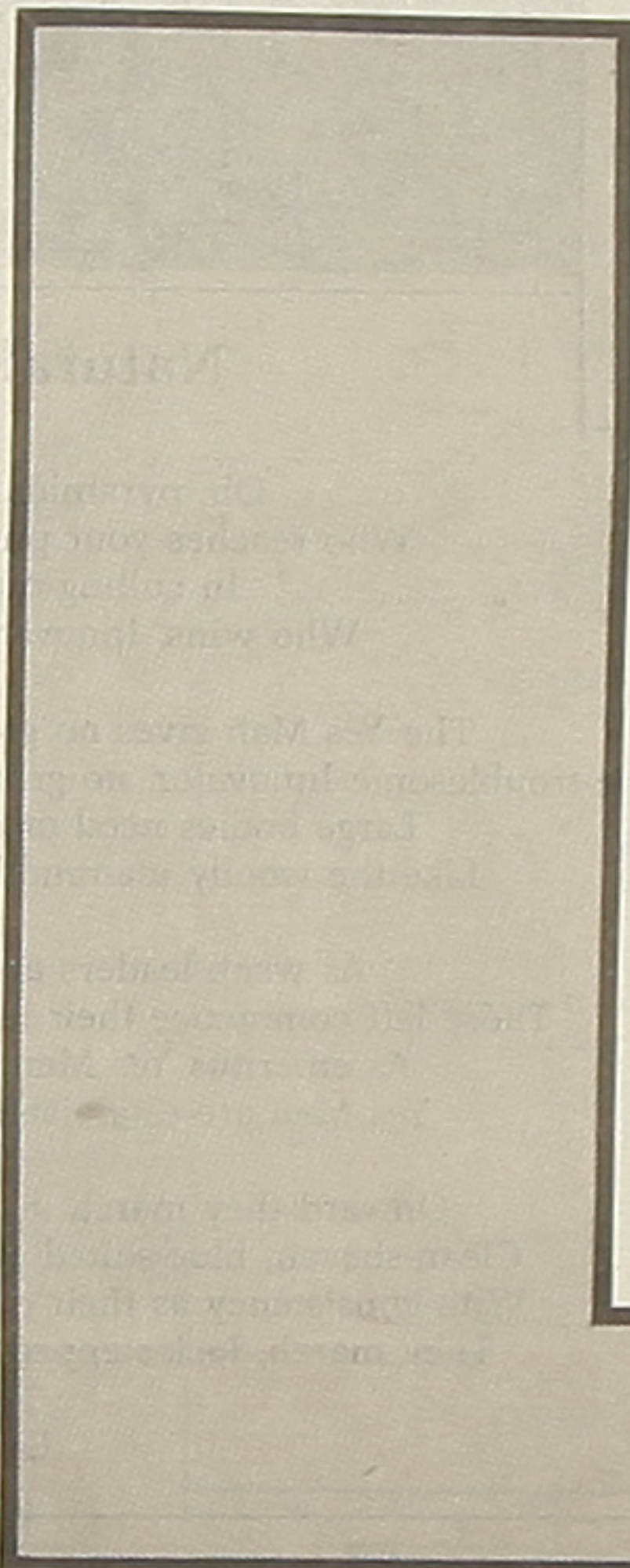


And I feel things will never be the same again for any of us. But this doesn't matter because for now we are together.



Gallery

by Mike and Mark R. Mulik



By My Side

Twinkling eyes
Wind-blown hair
Always a smile—
Words of good cheer.

Who'd ever known
that the end was nigh
I was robbed of the chance
to tell you good-bye.

Somehow I get the feeling
You're always by my side
You have gone and left me
But your memory hasn't died.

I hope you'll always be there
—in my mind—
And comfort me like before
With your love and support
I feel I can open any door.

Darla Clark

Sleepless Summer

We see ourselves in peach-half eyes,
and tether from clouds in sleepless summer;
our lips, whose words immortalize,
seal the whisper, protect the dead night.

Crouched, our breaths on boughs lay low—
the horse soon slips its hooves without rider,
while meadows wilt our arms,
and wind elopes without us.

Struck from the still Star
a bush now glares in the white night,
as we are numbed and moon shuts down,
and rain reiterates our kiss amid redundant thunder.

Snapped from the socket of Its heart,
we seal the whisper, protect the quiet light.

Randy Scott

Join Us

Follow me to a dream
Not a scary dream
Nor a happy dream
Not even a dream in between
A dream
So drop your flags
And fly into our dream where witches
Scream, where pipers pipe,
And bells ring
No children sing, but everything
Lives a dream
No leaders lead, no countries joust
You won't want to leave
You can't get out
Not of the dream where witches scream
Join us in our dream

Dorothy Shipley

Natural Selection

Oh, pyramidal corporate life,
Who reaches your pinnacle of strife?
In culling out the Also Ran,
Who wins, Innovator or Yes Man?

The Yes Man gives no ground for firing;
The troublesome Innovator, no grounds for hiring.
Large bodies need order to travel far,
Like the woolly mammoth and dinosaur.

As weak leaders accept no dissent,
Those left commence their inevitable assent.
As emeritus Yes Men need congruity,
Yes Men are established in perpetuity.

Onward they march in safe uniformity,
Clean-shaven, blue-suited strict conformity.
With consistency as their competitive edge,
They march, lock-stepped, over the ledge.

Larry B. Meacham

Good-bye Marie

Marie was only seventeen last time I saw her
 Now she's almost twenty-one
 She received a message from the message man
 Some people say you're so young
 So new is the day
 So bold is the fashion
 You can tell me that
 But you can't make me believe it

Marie had her birthday today
 I sent her a letter and she sent me away
 It's hard to get a message through
 When she won't even mumble—I love you

Bright as diamonds and medieval
 The clothes you wear from a carnival world
 Making progress the dressing genius
 Approaching a style that is classical
 Once more through broken silence
 The streets are filled with limosines
 After hours in the moonlight
 It seems we have met before

Once more from the front row
 I see you look away
 You take your place in a princess wardrobe
 As the curtain rises from the stage

Marie is twenty-seven now
 And she has so much style
 She knew our love would take awhile
 But she went away and she took away my smile
 Life can't all be fun
 I wish the best for anyone
 Who is full of dreams
 Good-bye Marie

Mike L. Mallory

Strays

The man took us both in,
 Gulliver, named for his travails,
 Ragged coat, and torn ear.
 Bones showed beneath his fur.
 In a tree to escape the dog's teeth,
 We lifted him down gently.
 We had no time in our lives for cats,
 But it didn't seem to matter.
 He decided to stay though we took him
 Three miles away to the river.
 Four days later he was back, unafraid of dog.
 He called the hound's bluff, made an uneasy pact,
 Washed his paws and waited for dinner.
 Gulliver's in danger of getting too fat.
 His thighs almost rub together.

The man found me in a run-down bar,
 Playing sad songs to an audience of fools.
 No Joan Baez, he thought I had talent.
 Today I sing love songs to the cows
 And play to a full house.
 He never took me to the river.
 Often, Gulliver and I get wanderlust.
 Out of pocket, we go in search of
 Wonderful times beyond the farm.
 The man stays, smiling to himself.
 He knows the strays will return,
 One with bird on his breath, lusting for Purina.
 And I, depleted by the world in a day,
 To bask in his warm, soft applause.

Brenda Cates Kilby

Spectacles

Even though I'm not fully transparent,
 It's easy to forget I'm there
 Through me her eyes squint,
 Sly sharp stares glaring
 glances to those unaware
 and smiling when looking
 Through me to another
 Other times I deliver to another a betrayed
 Look of love
 Only between her and I
 Lay the lie of hate
 Behind the convient screen

Dorothy Shipley

Into the Long, Descending Night

short fiction by Randy Scott

I.

She lay at a distance and turned her gaze upon asbestos face, eyeglass windows, revolving door. And light collided on rumbling breaths of hills, while a fevered wind hollowed-out October sound fell like leaves to the swarming fingers of the sea. Birds of disproportionate denominations rounded the vaporous network of black-fettered clouds and, pounding their heavy arms in pendulum thrusts, entered the gluttoned silence of the universe.

"I've always wondered what you think about when you come up here."

She glanced casually to meet his eyes. "I certainly wasn't thinking about you, David."

He sat down beside her, pushing her auburn hair to one side as he bent over to kiss her cheek.

"Marcela...?"

"Just leave me alone!" She stood up and shook her head several times. "I've been waiting here for at least three hours!"

"It couldn't have been over two—"

"And I'm supposed to go through it again, pretending that I've missed you—pursing my lips and pouting, holding out my lonely arms for only you? That's what you want me to do, isn't it?"

He only smirked, shaking his head.

"Are you honestly listening to me?"

She walked towards the cliff, carefully re-

counting her steps. David, all the while, no longer answered, remaining motionless with a long, unbending disbelief.

"I plan to leave Marseille with my father on the 1345 express for Munich. That's what I had intended to tell you last night, but you never came."

She turned around.

"We waited for you, David—for such a long time. You never came. We have to leave—and to leave you here."

David watched as she huddled herself within her blue overcoat.

"I can see the *Chateau d'If* from here," she whispered. "Such a tiny little island floating out to sea. You know, David, I want to always hear seagulls, and do you want to know why? Because I have learned by heart that there is another land so far away from here, written within a certain star."

She slowly turned around. "I had often dreamt that you would be that star."

Biting her lower lip she slowly descended upon him, kissing him on the forehead, pushing his arms down stubbornly. With one long breath she kissed his lips.

"Do you think I'm that naive?" David asked, pushing her away.

She kissed his neck several times. "No, much more."

"Your going to Germany won't prove

anything," David said, pushing her away. "There are only swollen memories from the time we left."

She glared at him. "We are all Jews—from the very start!"

He no longer wanted to hear her.

"That little, brittle man can't do anything against our will!"

Marcela looked down from the cliff, staring past a dead sea so tranquil and patient as each wave sank from the swollen beach below.

"He's a moron, David. Everyone can see that! They won't listen to him! They won't even talk to him!"

She rubbed his nose with the tip of her finger. "You foolish little teddy bear. Julius Caesar could not be dictator for life. Moses wasn't even allowed to put his foot on the Promised Land. Alexander was never great, just strong, but lonely and deserted. Even a bull-fighter has many chances of surviving, but eventually he must face the eyes of the bull as it slowly rips his lungs apart. Right now, we have to face it—we have to survive."

"For their sake," David retorted. "I know that line already."

He pushed her arm away. "You bore me, Marcela. If you can't live with me, you're going to be lonely with yourself, the only one who's being so naive and selfish."

She slapped his face and stood up quickly.

"When he's born, when he wants to know, I'll tell him everything! He'll soon like to despise you!"

"I hope you do—you tell him everything, but tell him the truth—"

"—That you're a selfish bastard, the shield wolf?" she laughed.

David grabbed her arm and twisted it. "Marcela, won't you at least look at me?"

She glanced down as his hand exerted more force, pressing her arm to the ground.

"Are you trying to make me cry, David?"

"Damn your father, anyway! He's taking you to Hell with him."

He finally pushed his weight against her as her body lay sprawled against the ground, dead to the dimming light that slowly crossed her face. Suddenly she felt her left foot against his stomach, and she watched his slow, tumbling descent, his long, innumerable nerves being split apart by the jagged rocks below.

II.

The train left so quickly past the frosted windows that it was barely possible to see Heidleberg, then Berlin, clinging to snow along the tracks. I lay within my father's arms, half-dreaming and awake. I looked up at his face as he wore his usual wrinkled smile. With his quick, brown eyes he pressed my head against his chest. "Marcela," he whispered, "try to sleep a little more," while his hard, but delicate hand covered my lips.

I reached up to kiss him as he slept, listening to his heart for the few remaining hours, desperately embracing each breath throughout the night.

III.

"Schnell! Schnell!" the voice persisted.

The iron door bolted open.

They again picked up the litter and entered the long, descending corridor that recoiled into loiterless echoes of limestone, each footstep cutting synaptic cadence like a taut, elastic clock. A candle was lit. They finally stopped. It was then that she saw the windows where no paintings had hung on the walls. And she glared past their black, immovable shadows that drank their way into her brain, while she watched the others, now moving, lick the blood that warmly flushed down from her face.

The last iron door was secured. A curtain was drawn. The figure in his white smock—wrinkled like his short smile—hurled both arms at one of the guards, clenching his fists around the epilets of his uniform.

"Warum musbt du immer daraufbestehen dasb du jemanden halbot Schlagst?" ("Why must you always insist upon beating someone half-dead?")

"Aber, Herr Major?" ("But, Major?") the guard politely questioned him, confused.

"Just get out of here, all of you!" He waved a tired arm across his chest. He then pointed his finger at the nurse seated in the corner. "Anna, stay here for a few minutes. I need to examine her."

He opened the curtain and bent over me. I tried to see him as he washed my face and dried my eyes; I could faintly feel his fingers traverse my breast while he held the dome of the stethoscope from rib to rib. "Heart is normal without mur-

mur, regular through S-4...." He touched my throat. "Neck supple without bruises...." He pushed up my eyelids. "Pupils are equal and react to light...."

He doubled the blanket around my chin.

I could see the guard all the while, pretending not to be there, a young man in his early twenties, attempting to hide erect against the door bolted behind him—tired of listening—as his blue, blank eyes closed motionless, his right arm shaking sporadically, dropping with his body to the floor.

Anna then called the other guards. They disposed of his body. It was snowing again as she reached the house of the Commandant and sat at his bedside until morning.

(The factories had been closed for the night.)

He went to each window and opened each lock. Still, there was the smell of sulfur.

The doctor's eyes sat next to me. He reached for my hand beneath the blanket....

...He turned her wrist gently until he could read the impregnated numbers on the underside of her arm, stroking each one with the tips of his fingers.

IV.

The grass rolled freely with the turning of her head as she witnessed the slow, but deliberate interlocking of neon streets below. Like a reshuttled breath, the town now slept so silently still.

Her eyes now crossed with the deep, white light, smiling as she heard the crying of her son so far away.

The Night Grows Still

to stop and look at the pretty lights
it only takes a second
but we never seem to have the time

taking each moment we spend together
for only its face value
not cherishing it forever

stop and look at the lights of the city
never seeming to stop
only flashing in their pattern

and still we take them for granted
moving through life
as the curse is chanted

the night grows still
and still grows the Night

you captured all of my love
getting nothing in return
now I turn stone-cold

I lie awake on this cold night
with visions of yesterday
only that and promises of Night

Death at the end of life's hallway
it had seemed so far
and it beckoned from so near

Death has received you at last
now I can only pray
and dream of our past

the night grows still
and still grows the Night

maybe in years to come
maybe never again
maybe when I die
maybe when our journeys begin
maybe nevermore
and maybe in the end
the night will grow still

Marc Allen Rusch

The Primeval Hunter

short fiction by Dharmendra Patel

The dry, desert wind is blowing over the sandy valley with a whispered hollowness, whistling as it wanders swiftly across the vast expanse of barren land. Above the rugged, brown, mountaintops, the sun is gently sinking, casting long, silent shadows on the desert floor.

A sole hunter, perched up high on his gigantic winged beast, looks up in the sky. There are no clouds save a single long stretch of puffy whites in the far west. The hunter smiles with anticipation as he will soon be there, giving chase to the orange sun. Though he knows he will not catch his elusive game, the chase, the thrill of flight, the surge of speed will be his cherished rewards. He and his beast will be content.

The beast that he rides and flies is a strange inhabitant of the desolate valley. The sky over this enormous wasteland has been dominated by primeval birds of prey for thousands of millenia. This bird of prey is of a different breed, however. It has long shed its reptilian skin and now wears a hard shell made of sterner stuff. Its eyes see further than before. Its talons reach out deadlier. Its roar is like thunder, like the deepest, darkest roar of an ancient dragon from the very depths of the earth.

As it sits on the ground, eager to fly, it urges its master, as if to point at the sky impatiently. It tries to move forward as its steady humming grows a little louder. Though the hunter shares his beast's eagerness, he waits patiently for the right moment. Like an understanding father, he kindly, but firmly holds the beast back. It is not yet time. The beast whines in protest at first but then slowly settles back into its low, continuous hum. In its own way, it can talk to the hunter. It speaks strangely, and to anyone else indecipherably, but the hunter understands. He holds a special relationship with the beast. They become one when they fly, each a living extension of the other, both sharing the same joys and pleasures of flight—and the same danger.

The sun has now set a little deeper behind the mountains, and the west is shaded with an orange hue. The hunter takes another longing look around the sky. The long stretch of clouds are tinged with grey on the eastern side and bright gold toward the direction of the sun. In the east, the moon is slowly rising challengingly. The desert seems desolate still, but less harshly so now. A swift cool breeze whistles past and then slowly dies down. With the setting of the sun, it is already cooling down, and soon the chill of the night will

set in.

A sound comes in over the throbbing hum of beast.

"Uhh, roger, tower control," the pilot acknowledges, allowing himself a smile. "Copy clearance, Viking Departure. Vector 229." With that, he eases the throttle forward a little as the sleek shape of the F-15 Eagle strains forward against the restraint of the brakes. Outside, as the afterburners light up, the rumble of the twin engines grow to a tremendous earth-shaking roar, making crewmen feel like their teeth would shatter. The pilot, hearing only a continuous hum and feeling a steady throb, keeps increasing power till it seems the beast will break free. The instant he releases his brakes, the huge aircraft lunges forward and barrels down the runway, accelerating very rapidly. The pilot, pushed back into his ejection seat, continues easing the throttle forward while keeping the stick down. The aircraft keeps gaining speed until it is well over the minimum take-off speed. The pilot pulls back on the stick and retracts his landing gear and braces himself for the sudden and severe stress as the Eagle gracefully lifts itself into the sky like a normal takeoff. But then, barely a hundred and fifty feet off the ground, the pilot jams the throttle forward and pulls back hard on the stick. Instantly, the aircraft responds as the full colossal power of its twin engines hurl man and machine into a treacherous, gut-wrenching tight swing, and shoots him straight up while the aircraft continues its rapid acceleration. His G-suit instantly fills up and constricts his legs and abdomen, allowing him to breath only in short gasps. The sudden G-forces push him back hard into his seat. In the palm of his left hand emanates 50,000 lbs. of raw power, which is then vectored by his right hand. In just a few seconds, unforgiving physics, technology, and sheer force shoots the pilot and his aircraft straight up several thousand feet in the air. It continues to accelerate. No other aircraft in the world can accelerate straight up except the F-15. The pilot knows this and grins cockily behind his oxygen mask. He turns and looks down on the rapidly shrinking base. He turns back around and looks off to his port at the clouds. He will continue climbing for a few thousand feet more before turning and diving into those golden clouds. †